



TWRA NEWS

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Positive Identification of Bear In Fatal Attack

Cleveland, Tenn.--At a joint press conference at Cleveland State Community College, the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency and USDA Forest Service Officials announced today that DNA testing positively identified one of the captured bears as the animal involved in the fatal attack on April 13, in the Cherokee National Forest, at Benton Falls, near the Chilhowee Recreation Area. "Various laboratories including the TWRA, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation recently provided reports on a variety of forensic tests conducted on the two captured bears. The items submitted brought us positive results that the second bear captured was responsible for the fatal attack of Elora Petrasek, 6, and the mauling of her mother, Susan Cenkus, 45, and her two year old son, Luke, of Clyde, Ohio," explained Ron Fox, Assistant Director of the TWRA.

The samples gathered from both bears were subjected to a variety of testing procedures designed to search for any human related evidence. Investigating authorities have learned from the FBI laboratory that the controlled samples gathered from under the front claws of the second bear captured tested positive for human DNA.

“TWRA and the Forest Service recognize the valuable support in the evidence collection phase of the Polk and Hamilton County Sheriff’s Departments, Polk and Hamilton County Medical Examiner’s Offices, FBI, US Fish & Wildlife Service, and Erlanger Medical Center, ” Fox added.

Numerous items were submitted to the three involved laboratories, with some of the items being transferred between agencies, for specific testing relating to the respective facilities’ capabilities.

The testing process began with an attempt to match samples of bear hair collected at a variety of locations by TWRA officials. Wildlife managers initially believed that this would be the most timely and conclusive avenue for a positive identification of the culprit bear. However, the National Wildlife Laboratory, operated by the Department of the Interior’s USFWS, was unable to make a positive identification due to the small amount of samples available for submission for analysis.

Dr. Mike Tabor, Chief Forensic Dentist at The State Medical Examiner's Office, examined photos of bite marks on the victims. His final report revealed that both bears' dental features were very similar in size and shape with no distinctive markers. Although he was not able to make a positive identification based upon the examination, he did conclude that some of the wounds depicted on the photographs were consistent with the size and shape of both black bears.

The second bear was discovered in a live culvert trap on April 17, in the Mulepen #1 area of the forest approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile from the attack site. It has been held in a secure location since the capture.

“It is the policy of the TWRA to destroy any native wild black bear proven to be involved in the attack of a human. The second bear has been removed from its holding area, euthanized by wildlife officials and retained for future necropsy. The 211 pound

male will be examined for any abnormalities in the bear's biological condition that could indicate the cause for the its violent behavior,” stated Fox. “We are confident that the animal responsible of this tragedy has been eliminated from the wild bear population of the Cherokee National Forest.”

Tom Speaks, USDA Forest Service, Cherokee National Forest Supervisor reported, “Based on the findings of the final evidence reports, the areas in and adjacent to Chilhowee Mountain that have been closed will reopen at 9:00 AM, EST Friday, June 16, 2006. This includes Chilhowee Recreation Area and the Parksville Campground, as well as roads and trails leading to the area. For additional information please call 423-338-3300.”

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